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POLITICAL FEATURE 1-1945
WAYNE COREY/CHANTABURI, THAILAND

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VIETNAM'S REFUGEES: WHY THEY FLED

ANNCR:

VIETNAMESE REFUGEES ARE CONTINUING TO ARRIVE IN COUNTRIES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA, MORE THAN A YEAR AFTER THE END OF THE VIETNAM WAR. WITH A REPORT ON WHY THEY ARE LEAVING VIETNAM, HERE IS VOA'S WAYNE COREY IN CHANTABURI, THAILAND.

VOICE:

AFTER VISITS TO TWO VIETNAMESE REFUGEE CAMPS HERE IN THAILAND A REASONABLY CLEAR PICTURE EMERGES. HATRED OF COMMUNISM AND FEAR OF COMMUNIST INTENTIONS ARE UPPERMOST IN THE MINDS OF THE REFUGEES. THEY TALK ABOUT FOOD SHORTAGES IN VIETNAM WITH ONLY SOME RICE AND SALT AVAILABLE, EVEN FOR THOSE FORCED BY COMMUNIST AUTHORITIES TO PERFORM HARD LABOR AT THE SAME TIME. THERE IS SUSPICION ABOUT VIETNAM'S NEW MILITARY DRAFT, BECAUSE THOSE DRAFTED ARE RECEIVING NO MILITARY TRAINING, NO UNIFORMS, AND NO WEAPONS.

REFUGEES SAY THOSE SENT TO THE NEW ECONOMIC ZONES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE HAVE A VERY DIFFICULT TIME BECAUSE THEY LACK PROPER TOOLS AND CLOTHING AS WELL AS ENOUGH FOOD. ONE CHINESE FROM SAIGON SAID HE LEFT VIETNAM BECAUSE HIS RUBBER EXPORT BUSINESS COLLAPSED AFTER HE WAS FORCED TO SELL RUBBER ONLY TO THE STATE AT WHAT HE CONSIDERED UNFAIR PRICES. A MAJOR IN THE FORMER SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARMY SAYS HE HAD TO GET PERMISSION FROM COMMUNIST OFFICIALS EVEN TO EAT HIS OWN CHICKENS.

ONE NORTHERNER SAYS HE HAS NEVER BEEN ABLE TO LIVE UNDER COMMUNIST RULE. WHEN THEY TOOK OVER THE NORTH HE SAYS, HE MOVED IN NINETEEN FIFTY-FOUR. NOW WITH THE COMMUNISTS IN CONTROL OF THE SOUTH TOO, HE SAYS HE COULD NOT REMAIN IN VIETNAM. HE

SAYS HE WORRIES THAT PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD DON'T UNDERSTAND THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNISTS AS HE DOES.

THE REFUGEES ARE EAGER TO TALK. THEY WANT THE WORLD TO KNOW WHY THEY LEFT VIETNAM -- EVEN THOUGH MANY STILL HAVE RELATIVES THERE. THERE ARE MANY STORIES OF RESISTANCE TO COMMUNIST AUTHORITY, INCLUDING RESISTANCE BY THE VIET CONG -- WHO ARE REPORTEDLY DEMONSTRATING THEIR HOSTILITY TOWARDS SOUTHERNERS AS WELL AS THEIR FRUSTRATION AT BEING PUSHED ASIDE AFTER THE COMMUNIST VICTORY.

IT USED TO BE SAID IN SOUTH VIETNAM THAT THE VIETNAMESE WHENEVER THEY FLED FROM COMMUNIST ATTACK OR TRIED TO AVOID COMMUNIST CONTROL, WERE VOTING WITH THEIR FEET. BASED ON EXTENSIVE INTERVIEWS WITH REFUGEES HERE IN THAILAND, THE VIETNAMESE ARE STILL VOTING. IF THE PRIME SLOGAN IN VIETNAM TODAY IS ALL FOR PRODUCTION, THE SLOGAN OF MANY VIETNAMESE IS, ALL TO ESCAPE BY ANY MEANS AND HOPE FOR THE BEST.

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JS/CAK